

If you're thinking of blowing a whistle, I'd think that the first thing that you would have to go through in your mind is: Are you willing to risk your career, at least at the place you're working now?

For my part, what I'm concentrating on is to try to encourage people to take risks in face of the fact that the risks are always going to be significant. No matter how much you do in the way of whistleblower protection, it isn't going to protect you all that much administratively from punishment in any organization. If you put out the dirty laundry, if you speak out of turn about things that your boss doesn't want out, they'll find ways of punishing you. And what I want to do is to make people aware of the fact that that isn't necessarily a conclusive reason not to do it. There are circumstances in which it's worth taking a large personal risk: one, when there are a lot of lives at stake. That, I think, does raise the issue of whether you should not be prepared to take a risk of your own career.

The other thing being raised right now is the situation in which very fundamental freedoms and a form of government is at stake. We're not talking now about just ordinary corruption. We're talking about averting right now a change in our form of government to a police state.

SB: What is it reasonable to hope that people will do in way of whistleblowing?

Well, certainly you will not get everybody who knows something to pay a personal price of losing clearance, access, career, job, friends, income, to expose that. You will not get a majority to do it. You will not get a very large proportion to do it, unfortunately.

Keep in mind that the number of whistleblowers you get on some things where the public needs desperately to know this information is extremely small. You're talking about handfuls of people in a given subject.

I believe it would very helpful if you doubled that, tripled that, made that ten times more. You're still talking still very small numbers, a hundred instead of five. That could make a vast difference in a lot of different areas, especially if they did it - and this is important - in a timely way, which is even rarer, much rarer. Doesn't apply to me, by the way.

The thing I would like to get out to people is what is really rare is to put out a document on a current administration while it is still very timely and can affect an ongoing process or to prevent a decision that hasn't yet been made.

The price you pay is going to be very significant in career terms, whether or not the stakes are very high.

Even if the number is proportionately still very small, a very significantly more number of people are capable of doing this if they face how much difference that it can make. And if they oppose an obligation to do this to the obligations they recognize to be loyal to their boss, loyal to their team, to keep their promises, to stand by and do right by their

families and their children, their college, all that. All these things are in play, things they feel as matters of principle to some extent, not just careerism, ambition - their identity as somebody who can be trusted with secrets. And to jump out of that is like jumping out of their skin. I know it was for me.

I think also your appeal is tempered by your emphasis on "only do it when there are these vital things at stake."

Well, if the costs weren't so great, I'd encourage people to tell the truth. It is rather broadly believed that of course people ought to tell the truth to Congress or whatever and they're shocked when they don't. The fact is, they don't. And you - the generic you here - wouldn't do it. That's not what people do. The costs are great and people don't want to pay those costs.

But the message I'm trying to get out is that a lot more people than do it are capable of paying that price. And people need to stop regarding the government as the highest authority on these matters. It's a tremendous change for somebody who thinks of himself, for example, as a president's man.

For a long time I didn't appeal to people to be whistleblowers or leakers because it seemed to me that I would be heard as being defensive about myself or apologetic or self-congratulatory. You know, do what I did. What I did was right and you should do it. And I didn't want to be heard that way.

And then I realized it really was important to encourage people to do this. For 30 years I've encouraged people to do civil disobedience in general. Yet I didn't talk much to audiences about whistle-blowing on the assumption that really they weren't in a position to do what I'd done anyway.

If I'd been talking to State Department people or the Defense Department - but that's a reason they're damned careful not to let me speak there - if I could talk to such an audience, I would have talked about doing what I did.

So I didn't bother to talk about whistle-blowing to outsiders. And then I realized, you know, whistle-blowing really is very important. I should be talking about it, I've been wrong not to talk about it. I realized that a way of talking about it which didn't have this "do what I did" aspect was to say, "Don't do what I did. Don't wait years like I did. Do it currently." You know, make it clear that I'm not saying that I acted absolutely rightly or that I didn't delay longer than I should have. But that it can be done better than I did. It really has to be done better than I did.

Don't wait until the bombs are falling. Don't wait until thousands more have died, years into the war, before going to Congress and the press with documents that you know would reveal lies to the public, threats to the Constitution and to our democracy, information that could avert a war or shorten a war, which is being wrongly withheld.

Now I know that this can't be done lightly. I certainly don't criticize people for leaking anonymously. Quite the contrary.

And I would say that documents generally do make a very big difference. The Abu Ghraib scandal certainly has not led to a clear-cut stopping of the practice even after the president signed that bill. But it has gotten a lot of attention and activity, which would not have happened without two types of documents. They needed both. They needed the photos to make the thing concrete and dramatic and they needed the Taguba Report which was leaked to Sy Hersh to show that it wasn't just a practice of a few people but it was a widespread, systematic practice, authorized at some higher level which they managed to cover up pretty effectively.

But both those documents were essential and they were timely. That's an example of the kind of stuff we need.

And like the NSA leaks.

Yes, I would like the public to see that these were people - as James Risen has reported - who were doing this conscientiously, that this was the right thing for them to do, they did it because the public needed it. I would like their example to be followed. Now obviously, if they're all put in prison for life or one year or for ten years, the example will discourage a lot of people as well as still encouraging some. It could have a cooling effect.

Above all, ideally I'd like to see them come out, take responsibility for it, even if they're outed. Risen said he's never in his years as a reporter seen such clear-cut examples of conscientious behavior.

I want that example to be out there. There has to be more of it. I think there are dozens of people who could have prevented this Iraq catastrophe if they had chosen to risk their career and probably paid for it. If Richard Clarke had put out documents, I think he might well have gone to prison for that. And saved how many Iraqi and American lives? And it would have been worth it for him, I believe. But there were dozens of other people. Not only Powell, but people who worked for Powell, people like Wilkerson, or Wilkerson's secretary. There are so many people who could do this.

I would say, hundreds and hundreds of people, in the joint staff, in the services, in intelligence, in the State Department - it could easily be thousands of people who thought this was illegal and disastrous. But none of them put out a document.

Putting out documents is of primary importance, then?

In many ways, yes. One of the effects you can really look for - it may destroy you in the process personally - but one of the effects you can begin to anticipate when you do something like that is that they will take action that put them at some legal risk. And they

lose. That's what happened in my case. They took illegal actions to intimidate me, to blackmail me, from putting out more stuff. If I had only copied the Pentagon Papers, or if I'd copied more but they didn't know it, Nixon would have stayed in office, in my opinion.

But knowing that I had stuff on him and that I was not to be intimidated just by the threat of prison I was already facing, they had to find other ways, and there were no legal ways to try to stop me. They had to try illegal ways to stop me, just as they were doing with Joseph Wilson.

You touched on in your book something I've rarely seen when you discussed making your decision to join a peace march and doing your first leafleting. You discussed the fear of feeling absurd:

Something very important had happened to me. I felt liberated. I doubt I could have explained that at the time. But by now I have seen his exhilaration often enough in others, in particular people who have just gone through their first action of civil disobedience, whether or not they have been taken to jail. This simple vigil, my first public action, had freed me from a nearly universal fear whose inhibiting force, I think is very widely underestimated. I had become free of the fear of appearing absurd, of looking foolish, for stepping out of line.

SB:How do you help people to get over that fear of looking foolish?

Well, what does foolish mean? It means behaving in a way very differently, oddly, strangely. And it would appear, ineffectively. After all, most people don't flatter themselves that what they're doing is extremely important or effective, but they're usually working within a structure - government or a corporation or university that's very powerful and prestigious and important, even if they're individual employees.

If you step out alone, if you stand on a sidewalk naked of any institutional affiliation, just saying, "I think this, here's what I think we should do," or "I'm against that," you're all out there alone, meaning you're acting very differently from everybody else. And that in itself looks odd and threatening; it looks crazy while you're doing it. How could acting all by yourself, little you, or with a few other losers, possibly have any effect on anything? Whatever you know of your own rationality, you know you're going to face a question that you don't ordinarily face: Is this person crazy? Are they a homeless psychopath of some kind? Have they lost their marbles? People asked that about me all the time, my old RAND colleagues, Has Dan gone crazy?

Since I've been activist and very rarely with even the remotest hint of effect, I've felt for a long time you have to push on every door. It's very hard to predict when these very long-shot things in fighting the government will work. It depends on chance or things beyond your control very often, timing and what else is going on.

For example, I don't think that she or anyone had really thought it through, the circumstances that taking an action like that in Crawford had the peculiar effect that you had a lot of press there with nothing to do and no news except that the president had cut some brush today. And that they therefore would have time and interest in going over and taking a look at what was going on.

What I hear you saying is that because you don't know beforehand what will work, you just keep trying different things.

Yeah, that's what I'm saying. What I did during Vietnam was what people should be doing now, and that is: Everything they can think of that may contribute to ending one of three extreme dangers: one, a more or less endless prolongation of the Iraq war. That's going to be very hard to change, but obviously we should be working on it.

Two, averting an attack on Iran, and especially the use of nuclear weapons on Iran.

Three, trying to avert the institution of a police state here under George Bush as dictator.

All of these things are in a crisis phase, although frankly Iraq is going to be with us for a long time. It's appropriate for a lot of people to be doing an awful lot more than they are doing to avert those.

The message to be heard is: This is a situation that justifies risking your career and your associations and your freedom and your life. It justifies the kind of courageous action that we are asking of every person in Iraq every hour of the day and night. There's nobody over there - unlike Vietnam - who's safe in their beds from a mortar attack. It's certainly not safe when they go outside the Green Zone. And we're regarding that as being a routine thing to be asking of them. Oh, they're our brave soldiers and we're very grateful for it, but we're not surprised they're being so brave. And they are very ordinary people, that's for sure, all these terribly brave people. They did not sign up because they were terribly brave, the situation demands that they be brave and they're living up to it, they're being very brave physically.

It's time for people in this country, civilians, to start looking into themselves for the ability to be brave like that. And not physically, but to have what the Germans term "civil courage." Bismarck said at one point, courage on the battlefield is not rare, but civil

courage is rare. We need that concept over here. People talk of moral courage but it's rarely defined what that means exactly.

Civil courage means standing up for principle in the face of the state, risking career, risking the good opinion of other people for the good of the community and the society.

This notion of civil courage seems separate from that of physical courage to me.

Right. Physical courage doesn't do it. I always felt that I would be very calm under fire, I thought I would be when I was a Marine. And when I was in Vietnam I was interested to see if that turned out to be true, and it was true. But that was true of everybody around me. That's very common in the field, as Bismarck said.

But people who are physically courageous, it's not a tip-off as to whether they'll really be able to have civil courage. They're doing that under orders or to fulfill the mission. To risk doing what you think you should against the will of your superiors or your team, that seems to take some other kind of characteristic and I don't know what it is.

IRAQ—VIETNAM PARALLELS (Part Five)

Based on your knowledge of history - and particularly Vietnam - what parallels do you see now with the war in Iraq?

There were certain aspects of what was going on with Hussein that seemed obvious to me were lies right from the beginning. Even so, I did assume he had some WMD's.-- not nuclear but chemical and biological. And our government seemed so sure and so precise about that, I didn't think they'd stick their necks out to be that positive on the WMD's if they didn't have some fairly solid evidence.

What seemed absurd from the very beginning was to say that that constituted an immediate danger to the United States. If they retained even a large quantity of chemical weapons and biological weapons, there seemed no reason to think that they would use those weapons unless they were attacked. By the same token, if they were attacked, it seemed all too plausible that they would use them - in fact, almost certain. It made the decision look, in that respect, terribly reckless to me, almost insane.

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Meanwhile, for Powell to say, as they all were saying from early on, that Saddam Hussein was the number one danger to the United States seemed bizarre, clearly untrue. It seemed to me that Powell could not believe that Saddam Hussein was the number one danger, or was even a major danger.

Moreover, the idea that there was a connection with Al Qaeda... everything I was reading suggested that that was very implausible.

Those two judgments both seemed to me to just totally undermine the idea that it would serve our security interests to be attacking Saddam, and that there was any immediate, compelling reason to do it.

Where India and Pakistan and North Korea had nuclear weapons, where Russia had tens of thousands of poorly guarded nuclear weapons and other material, this was indeed a very dangerous world and I couldn't see Saddam Hussein on the list of major dangers-- certainly not at the head of the list.

we'd get a first use of nuclear weapons against that, by us or Israel. That's one of my We seem to have problems learning from history, don't we?

A very sad thing, and it isn't just Americans. When I try to draw lessons from history and pre-history, I've reached some unhappy conclusions about the nature of our species. Not just about Americans or capitalists. And part of it is that our concern for other people is very selective and very easily manipulated by leaders and by propaganda. And people are capable of being very little concerned about masses of deaths and suffering of other people - foreigners, far-away, invisible, not related, different languages, different religions.

They can be led by leaders to be concerned about that, but it's also very easy to distract them from it, into not being very concerned about it at all.

And it's very hard for Republicans to learn from Democrats. And the Vietnamese, I think, didn't learn all that much from having been invaded. They went into Cambodia and didn't really do very well. The Chinese went into Vietnam and got a bloody nose. The Soviets really reproduced our Vietnam experience in Afghanistan.

People say, Of course, we don't plan to stay in Iraq. We just plan to stay until there's a democratic government, a democratic government that will ask us to stay in our bases there and which will be friendly to Israel, and assure US that women's rights will be observed and so forth, but above all that the contracts will be recognized that we're signing now for all the deals about oil. We don't have to be there indefinitely, all we need is a government that is friendly in all these respects, as Chalabi promised us.

Well, that's a recipe for staying forever. Even if this administration lets go of all the other conditions, I don't believe they'll give up on the bases and the oil. Nor will its successors, Republican or Democrat. So I think that's what we will be doing, staying forever. Unless the rest of us, outside the government, force change on the leadership of the Democrats as well as the Republicans, which will be difficult and take a long time.

SG: And that's why there's such a resistance to naming a timetable and calling everybody traitors who want a timetable.

Absolutely... What are the secret intentions or plans of the White House, specifically of Bush and Cheney and Rumsfeld? I think it is not their intention or expectation or willingness to see a total removal of U.S. influence and presence in Iraq. Ever. What people need to face up to is what I regard as a likelihood that this war is going to go on much longer than two years or four years or eight years. I think that figures like 30 and 40 and 50 years should be considered. That's what they have in mind. I'm talking about intentions that I think may very well be fulfilled by Democrats as well as Republicans, intentions to hold on to bases and oil at all costs. I'm not at all confident that Democrats will be willing to give up those bases.

SB: You honestly think we'll be there for 50 years?

The oil in the region won't run out much before that. This administration wants to run the world, and controlling the Middle East oil spigot is crucial to their hopes. And I don't think later administrations will be eager to be seen as having given up on strategic assets we've just acquired by conquest.

The game here is empire and that's been going on for a long time, about 5,000 years probably, with not much difference

SB If, as you've said before, you fear us going into Iran, won't we have to have a draft? Won't that create so much protest they can't move forward with their plans?

No. First of all, the draft didn't stop Vietnam. It went on and on and could have gone on longer. I think we were very lucky in a number of ways that it didn't go on a lot longer. Anyway, it wasn't the draft, it was the large casualties and that was a result of Westmoreland's search-and-destroy missions and attrition strategy..

If they had stopped that and really changed the strategy and gotten the U.S. casualties down greatly, they could have stayed in Vietnam and they would not have been forced out of it, because Americans are very tolerant of bombing and they're very tolerant of foreigners dying.

SB: And that appears to be Bush's strategy for the next year.

That's what he hopes for.

SB: He's going to go to air power and pull some troops out.

And Americans will go along with that.

Yes, they will.

The American people ... I have to say, I've been very dismayed at the degree of acceptance there has been of the torture. An encouraging sign is of McCain and the other 96 or so who went against it, that was good. But you know, will we or will we not let Bush get away with his signing statement, that he's not really bound by the bill? How much of the torture will now be outsourced to Iraqis? And will Americans get very upset by that?

SB: And the torture is clearly inflammatory and self-defeating, feeding the hatred of America. Why is that so hard to understand?

We're talking about a species thing, a resistance to foreseeing that violence has dangerous consequences, that it leads to reciprocation. The "cycle of violence" is not just a cliché. The idea that violence breeds violence, that violence breeds hatred, rage and revenge, some kinds of violence more than others - that terrorism against civilians, and torture, breeds rage and hatred. And that makes people suicidally angry. They're ready to die in order to take other people with them. Humans - especially males in power - resist knowing all that, or learning it, when they turn to terrorism and torture.

SB: Yet Bush is now talking about drawing down troops.

Nixon was doing what Bush is doing now: He was using the word, "withdrawal," "I'm withdrawing." Meaning, really, "I'm reducing." We haven't done much reduction yet in Iraq, but I do expect some reduction to happen.

Bush's strategy, I'm sure, will be to fool people to say yes, we're on our way out, we're going down and everybody wants to think we're going down to zero when he doesn't have that in mind any more than Nixon had it in mind in 1969 or 1970. Nixon had no thought of going down to zero. A combination of events brought him to that, finally, by 1973. But it was against his will and it was against his expectations.

Well, I don't think Bush has any idea that we'll ever be out of those bases and he would regard that as a total failure, a failure he does not intend or expect to preside over. And I'll go further: I don't expect him to either. I don't expect his successor to do it.

I'm working. I'm hoping that among other things we'll get out of Iraq, but I don't have much confidence. I think there's a chance or I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing. I want to enlarge that chance, and I think enlarging that chance can be done. But I admit I think it's much less than an even chance. The odds are, I think we will one way or another hang onto the bases in that oil-rich country indefinitely, for a very long time. We'll let go of New Jersey before we let go of Iraq. Because the oil's pretty exhausted in New Jersey.

SB: What would your recommended response to 9/11 have been?.

It was a major, dangerous terrorist attack, by an amorphous, non-state collection of adversaries with no fixed address. It called for coordinated, worldwide international and domestic police and intelligence measures, with our department of defense and its

military measures playing some role but not at all the leading, major role implied by "war."

Of course, we now know that Bush intended from the beginning to use 9/11 as an excuse for a real war in Iraq run by the DOD, which was probably his main reason for invoking the image of "war" right after 9/11. But the fact that everyone went along with that dubious description of our terrorist danger turns out to have had some other very ominous consequences, since Bush seems to believe that the U.S. commander of chief of the armed forces, in an endless "war against terror," is literally a dictator.

Within days of 9/11, we've just learned, he secretly suspended indefinitely the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution by authorizing unlimited warrantless wiretaps, against explicit legislation forbidding this. He thinks, and his shameless (or fascist) house lawyers tell him, that he got authority to do this when Congress - except for Barbara Lee - delegated to him the decision to make himself a wartime commander-in chief.

BUSH, THE NEXT 9/11 AND THE APPROACHING POLICE STATE (Part Six)

[From a Walter Cronkite interview conducted June 23, 1971, while Ellsberg was in hiding after releasing the Pentagon Papers. Ellsberg was moving around Boston in safe houses until he could get the entirety of the document published. Once they were wholly published - in 19 newspapers - he surrendered to authorities.]

Cronkite: What about the immediate effect [of these revelations] on the war as of these days in June, 1971?

Ellsberg: Yes, the war is going on.... I hope the Senate will go much further. I hope that they discover that their responsibilities to their citizens, the citizens of this country and to the voters, do go beyond getting re-elected, and that they're men, they're free men who can accept the responsibility of ending this war.

My father had a favorite line from the Bible, which I used to hear a great deal when I was a kid: "The truth shall make you free." And I hope that the truth that's out now--it's out in the press, it's out in homes, where it should be, where voters can discuss it--it's out of the safes, and there is no way, no way to get it back into the safes--I hope that truth will free us of this war. I hope that we will put this war behind us.... In such a way that the history of the next 20 years will read nothing like the history of the last 20 years.

--Daniel Ellsberg

Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers

One of the more poignant parts of your book is your interview with Cronkite, in which you say you hope that what you did in releasing the Pentagon Papers was to ensure that the next 20 years of history would read nothing like the past 20 years.....

What I said at the time was that I hope the history will be very different. I don't recall having any great confidence. There is no question in my mind that our problems are very systemic. The degree to which it's working out now as a replay of Vietnam - and of course, there are differences - is kind of uncanny.

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I think on a broader scale, I have much less confidence or hope - though I still do have some hope, but much less confidence - than I used to that people or systems or societies really learn from history in a useful way. In other words, I think the whole idea of learning from history ... well, that's not what humans do very much. I don't think there are a lot of examples of people learning, especially from other people's experience.

If and when there's another 9/11 while Bush is in office, I think he'll get what he wants. And what he wants is - I have a sort of litany of what I think you'd get. Maybe I should just say the list right now.

First, I think you get a new Patriot Act, probably drafted already, that makes the old one look like the Bill of Rights. And the Bill of Rights is gone. Obviously, it hasn't had any reality in the minds of the White House, the administration, as a desideratum, as something to hang onto, since they got in, or since 9/11 anyway.

Second, total surveillance, which apparently we may have right now. I think that what the NSA is probably doing is a massive, massive vacuum cleaner operation here within America as well as in and out, and that we're talking about millions and millions of intercepts. I suspect what we're going to find out is in effect what Admiral Poindexter called Total Information Awareness, that's what was turned on. And the targeted wiretaps--the individual ones that they should have asked the FISA court for warrants on but didn't--are probably illegal for two other reasons as well: They're based on the illegal mass data-mining program, and some of them, probably a lot of them, target journalists, politicians and antiwar activists with no relation to terrorism. I'm guessing that they didn't apply for warrants--or for changing the law--because even the FISA court wouldn't give warrants in these cases, or for data-mining, nor would even a Republican Congress make these legal.

Even before the investigations we need of all this, given the overwhelming prima facie appearance of illegality, there should be senators saying right now, "stop." A lot of them, even Republicans, have uttered the words "illegal," "unconstitutional," "impeachable" about the secret NS programs. but I don't know of one who has gone on to say, "This must be stopped. Right now." While it's being investigated.

When it comes to the will and determination of this executive branch to conduct unconstitutional surveillance, the die has been cast, the shift has been made. The question before us now is whether the public and the rest of the government--Congress, courts, the